

Back Cast

By Ron Wilson



Fishing with girls.

This is something I've done little of – compared to the hours spent casting, wading and trolling in the company of guys – which is a darn shame. I don't remember ever fishing with either sister; having my older sibling bait my hook as a kid or later having to piggyback my curly-haired kid sister across a creek.

Their streamside absence at the time didn't strike me as odd because they had other interests, and slogging around in a mountain creek in beat up Converse sneakers and no socks wasn't one of them. I'm certain of it.

Then again, there was a good chance they were never invited, which wasn't my department, as I scrambled to locate rod, reel, pocket knife and a cheap, Army-green canvas bag that passed for a tackle box and creel. The faster I moved, I figured, the better my odds were of not being left behind.

Mom didn't fish, at least not until later in life after Dad died and her children were grown and gone. Photographs of her dressed in chest waders, cap, holding a fly rod and looking the part, proves this, even though I wasn't around to witness it.

She moved into a house, more for the view than the fishing, on a pretty good stretch of trout stream that I fished relentlessly on visits. She'd often find a flat rock, with a paperback in tow, and watch between pages as I made my way upstream. But that's as close as we ever got to fishing together – her watching and smiling the same smile if I landed a fish or wrapped my bait around a tree limb – which is a darn shame.

It was never a deliberate decision to make our daughter – the middle child sandwiched between two boys – into an angler to make up for what I missed with my sisters and mom. My thinking just isn't that deep. Instead, it was simply a matter of putting a fishing rod in her hands and hoping, like her older brother, it was something she would come to enjoy.

It's worked, so far, to a degree. Like a lot of kids nowadays, there's a lot competing for her time. There's dance, soccer, basketball, volleyball, friends, shopping, making jewelry, scooters, bikes, gymnastics, music and an infatuation to change outfits and redecorate her room at a pace that escapes me.

All of those things are important, of course, but so is fishing. Not so much for the activity itself, but rather the setting where it takes place – places where mud sticks to your shoes, turtles warm themselves atop rocks, beavers build lodges, shorebirds wade the shallows, and nesting Canada goose pairs scold you for even thinking about getting too close.

A lot has been written about introducing kids to fishing and the best way to go about it. Experts have provided tips on fishing gear, where to go, which fish species to target, best baits, and so on. Much of it is good advice, but not gospel. You know your kids better than anyone, so it shouldn't be much of a stretch to recognize the ingredients for a good time outdoors.

At our house, it starts with getting ready. Our daughter likes to talk, so the simple act of opening the lid to her tackle box for a quick inspection elicits a verbal salvo of why she prefers the orange bobber over the red, at what age she got the tackle box, how many rubber worms will comfortably fit into each tray (way more than her lucky number three, it turns out, which temporarily jinxes the trip), her strategy behind storing the lead weights and hooks separately, why is it that my tackle box is bigger and stores neater stuff, and even though she's older now, there's no way she's going to put a worm on hook without some help ...

Whew.

Odds are she could probably talk the worm into crawling on the hook on its own when she gets going like this, but that's OK. It just means she's fired up and will likely stay that way until we run out of sunflower seeds and pop, or the weather drives us from the water.

Our last trip it was the weather that gave us the boot before we could figure the fish out, but for two days after I was reminded how her casting has improved, how she nearly slipped down the beaver slide into the lake, and how her orange bobber, not red, was pulled under by what was certainly a big fish.

Yep. I remember.



Fishing with Kids

If you're looking for a reason to take a kid fishing, June offers a couple:

- June 4-5 – North Dakota residents fish for free these days without a license. Kids 15 years and under always fish free.
- June 19 – Father's Day.